



Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Community Engagement.....	6
2.1 What is community engagement?.....	6
2.2 Why do people engage?	6
2.3 Principles.....	7
2.4 Standards.....	8
3. Continuum of engagement.....	10
3.1 Deciding on how to engage.....	10
3.2 Types of engagement	13
4. Planning for engagement.....	16
5. Understanding communities.....	21
6. Stakeholder engagement.....	30
7. Communication for engagement.....	34
8. Managing expectations and issues.....	37
9. Engagement methods and tools.....	39
9.1 Engagement methods.....	39
9.2 Setting up groups and committees.....	43
9.3 Using online Engagement	44
10. Evaluating engagement.....	46
Bibliography.....	48

This Framework was informed by extensive consultation with Tasmanian Government agencies and with the Tasmanian community. The Department of Premier and Cabinet would like to thank those who contributed their time and ideas.



I. INTRODUCTION

The *Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement* (the Framework) provides a practical, principled and evidence-based approach to community engagement. The purpose of the Framework is to support the Government in its engagement activities by:

- providing a whole-of-government policy on community engagement;
- providing the necessary information, resources and tools to ensure effective engagement by government with individuals and communities;
- improving the quality and coordination of community engagement activities undertaken by government; and
- promoting the importance of community engagement in effective government decision-making and resource allocation.

The purpose of this Framework is to provide guidelines for Tasmanian Government agencies to undertake community engagement. It is a 'tools not rules' approach that aims to improve the coordination and consistency of community engagement, whilst encouraging creative and innovative approaches.

The Framework forms part of a suite of complementary whole-of-government tools developed by the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) to guide the development and implementation of policy and service delivery. These tools include the Tasmanian Government Approach to Collaboration, the Tasmanian Government Communications Policy and the Tasmanian Government Project Management Guidelines.

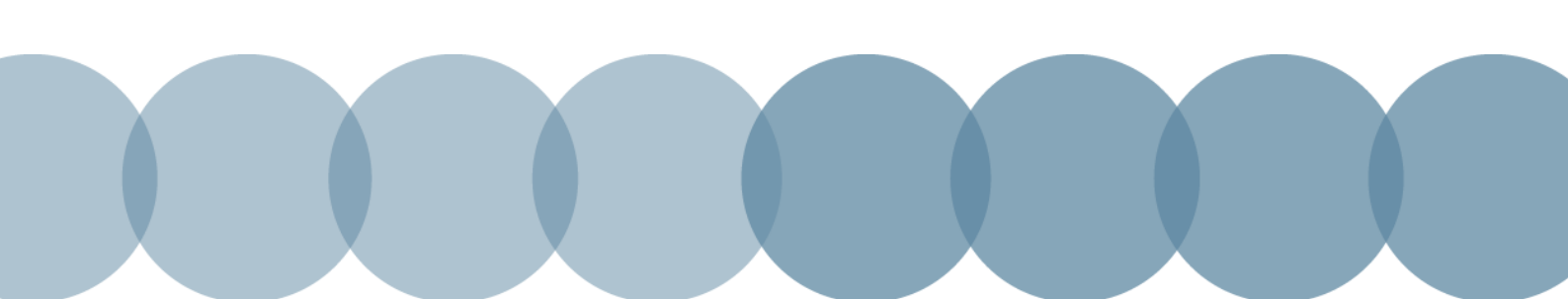
Tasmania's small population and size means that there is an enormous opportunity for the Government to lead the nation in community engagement practices.

From the extensive consultation¹ undertaken to inform the Framework, it is evident that Tasmanian communities, organisations and local government value engagement highly. This aligns with national and international trends where 'public participation in policy development and service delivery is increasing, and is viewed as desirable by both government and communities.'²

Governments must also meet rising demands for better quality public services despite tight budgets and cost of living issues. Working and engaging with communities to address challenges and opportunities will be integral in creating a sustainable future for Tasmania.

¹ Key findings from the consultation are included in Appendix I.

² The Allen Consulting Group, 2011, *Towards Participation 3.0: Stakeholder Engagement in the Public Sector*



The Framework recognises how much time, knowledge, expertise and energy communities have put into advising, feeding back and working with government to inform and improve legislation, policies, programs, projects and services – and recognises this effort is ongoing. It focuses on achieving quality and consistent community engagement practices through rigorous planning, a commitment to improve two-way engagement between communities and the Government and achieving more equitable outcomes for Tasmanians.

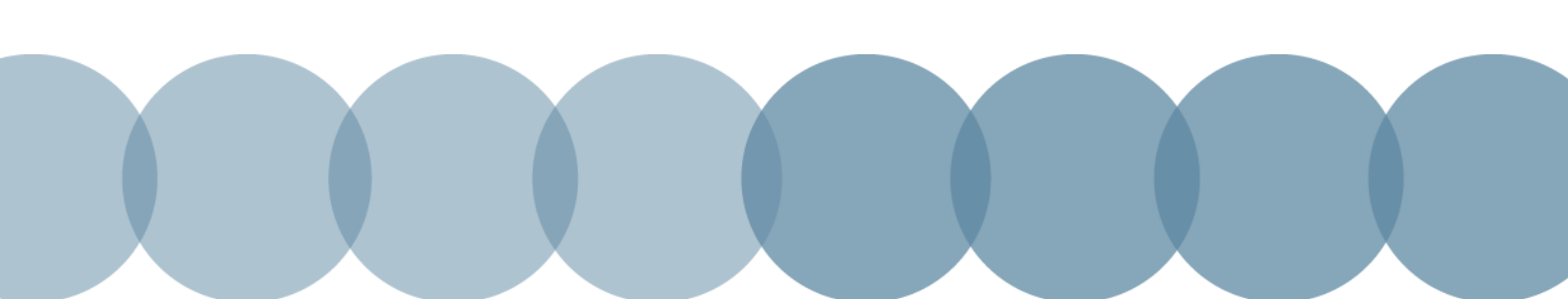
Benefits of community engagement

Community engagement enables better outcomes for both the community and the Government. It enables all parties involved to identify the concerns, risks, opportunities, options and potential solutions that surround an issue, leading to more informed decision-making and mutual benefits that include:

- ☐ better policy development and service delivery;
- ☐ better understanding of the day-to-day experience of people in communities;
- ☐ better relationships between the community and the government;
- ☐ community awareness and understanding about an issue;
- ☐ community buy-in and higher levels of community ownership;
- ☐ greater community support for, and more effective policy implementation;
- ☐ determining what all the considerations and issues are;
- ☐ determining what will work in reality and what will not;
- ☐ a mechanism for feedback/evaluation on existing policies;
- ☐ improved communication pathways, such as the use and further development of community networks;
- ☐ opportunity to develop individual and community capacity;
- ☐ legitimisation of decisions around controversial issues;
- ☐ mutual learning;
- ☐ reduced conflict within stakeholder groups, as individuals and communities can hear and understand each other's points of view leading to consensus; and
- ☐ uncovering new ideas and expertise.

Communities need an opportunity to meet and discuss issues with each other and with government to develop innovative solutions, share their experiences, expand their understanding around issues and develop empathy with competing stakeholders. Creating policy solutions through the engagement process involves compromises and trade-offs that balance community interest as a whole and enable budget priorities to be set.³

³ ACT Government, 2011, Engaging Canberrans: A Guide to Community Engagement, p. 6



It is important to get community engagement practices right. Getting it wrong can mean that good initiatives fail and future attempts at community engagement are undermined or shunned - which can be worse than no practice at all.⁴ Poor practice creates mistrust and wastes people's time and money.

Coordination and collaboration

Feedback from both Tasmanian Government agencies and the community tells us that there is not enough evidence to show that agencies are adequately engaging, coordinating or collaborating with each other. Working together effectively across agencies is a key internal challenge faced by the Tasmanian State Service and can create frustration for both State Servants and the community, leading to unnecessary duplication, inefficiencies and confusion, and less successful initiatives.

The Tasmanian Government Approach to Collaboration

The Framework complements the Department of Premier and Cabinet's (DPAC) paper Collaboration: A Tasmanian Government Approach.⁵

The aim of the approach is to encourage a culture of collaboration across government and provide a guide to assist Tasmanian Government agencies to work better together on complex policy and service delivery issues.

The Approach outlines the benefits and costs of collaboration and identifies six critical factors or principles for working together successfully:

- ☐ **Leadership:** Promote collaboration to drive outcomes from specific projects.
- ☐ **Trust:** Develop trust to build working relationships and effective teams.
- ☐ **Shared Aims:** Be clear about shared aims and benefits from the outset and evaluate progress regularly.
- ☐ **Membership:** Identify and engage the right people to participate in decision-making.
- ☐ **Accountability:** Consider accountability (and budget) arrangements early to plan, resource and manage projects.
- ☐ **Information sharing:** Establish and maintain clear lines of communication.

These principles can be applied to different levels of government and external stakeholders (government business enterprises, non-government and community sector organisations).⁶

⁴ Involve, 2005, *People and Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision making* p.12

⁵ DPAC (2010) *Collaboration: A Tasmanian Government Approach*

<http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/collaboration - a tasmanian government approach>

⁶ The Collaboration Team, located in DPAC Policy Division is available to provide advice and support to agencies seeking to undertake collaborative activity. For further information email: policy@dpac.tas.gov.au



Your Care, Your Say

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) produce Your Care, Your Say as a guide for engaging with health consumers. This resource may be used in conjunction with the Framework to assist engagement with health consumers.

Evaluation of the Framework

The effectiveness of the Framework will be evaluated two years after its implementation. Community participation will be an important part of this evaluation.

The information resources that support the Framework will be reviewed and updated as required over this period.

Implementation

The effectiveness of the Framework relies on increased communication and coordination across government agencies.

“The aim should not only be to facilitate better engagement, but also to ensure better government, and in the long term a community better equipped to engage.”

Written submission



2. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

2.1 WHAT IS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT?

Community engagement includes all interactions between community, community members and the Government. These interactions include:

- ☐ one-way communication and providing information;
- ☐ two-way communication and sharing;
- ☐ working with communities through partnerships; and
- ☐ community empowerment.

In practice, community engagement activities include:

- ☐ informing through accurate and timely information;
- ☐ listening;
- ☐ gathering feedback on an issue or existing initiative;
- ☐ involving communities in decision-making and/or using their advice to influence what is decided;
- ☐ working or partnering with communities, and
- ☐ giving communities what they need to make their own decisions.

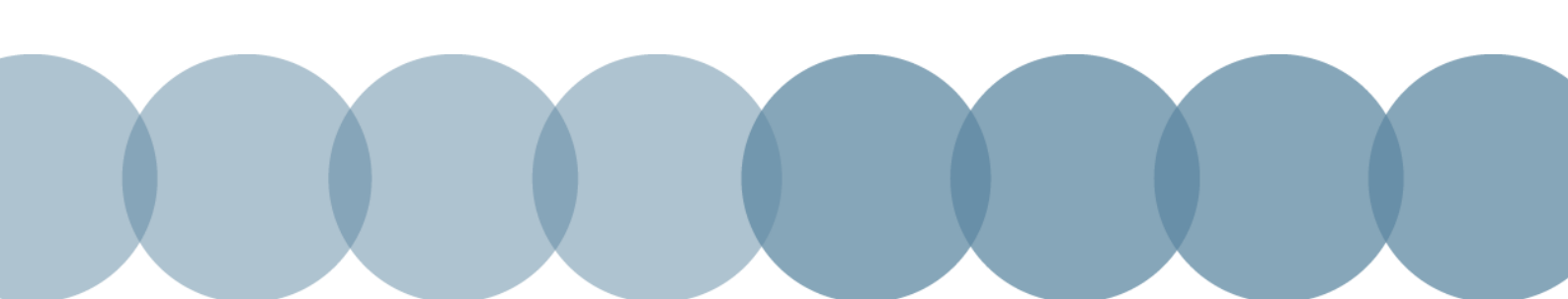
2.2 WHY DO PEOPLE ENGAGE?

“People participate in engagement because they have a real interest in making their community a better place.”

Community Member, Geeveston

People engage with government for many reasons, such as:

- ☐ an issue or initiative is affecting them, or they are concerned it will affect them;
- ☐ to raise an issue or discuss new and emerging trends;
- ☐ to evaluate existing government services;
- ☐ to protest a decision;
- ☐ they are invited to participate in engagement;
- ☐ they are employed by or are a member of an organisation where engagement is required;
- ☐ they are an expert or knowledgeable in their field and want to make a positive contribution;
- ☐ they may be seeking new services and support; and
- ☐ changes to legislation are being made.



A community is likely to become engaged when they are interested in an issue, are informed and believe their voice will be heard, considered and then acted upon.

What is a 'community'?

A community is a group of people who share something in common. It may be location, interests, culture, language, beliefs, values or traditions. Individuals can be members of many communities.

Communities can also identify and form around issues. These issues may magnify the similarities or differences of community members. This may result in the identification and adoption of different methods and techniques when undertaking engagement.

2.3 PRINCIPLES

The following principles have been determined in consultation with Tasmanian Government agencies, communities across the State, best practice community engagement models and the principles have been identified and used by Tasmanian Government agencies in existing and related policies and projects.

Having a principled approach means that we recognise that community engagement is not just a process but that it is also about developing respectful and mutually beneficial relationships – not just between the Government and the community, but between people.

1. **Accountability:** Assuming responsibility for the process and the outcome.
2. **Trust:** Develop relationships and demonstrate trustworthiness.
3. **Clear and open communication:** Use plain language and ensure communication is two way.
4. **Flexibility:** Being responsive and flexible to the needs of the community and the engagement process.
5. **Honest and upfront:** The information, limitations and opportunities that relate to the situation or issue are presented truthfully.
6. **Listening:** A commitment to listen and value input.
7. **Mutual respect and responsibility:** Recognition that both community and government are responsible for outcomes.
8. **Non-judgemental:** Acceptance of how participants think and feel.
9. **Transparency:** An open process.
10. **Understanding the community:** Avoid assumptions and stereotypes.

2.4 STANDARDS

The following standards are informed by the principles for engagement and represent a practical guide for planning engagement activities. The standards also help to outline what the community can expect when engaging with government agencies.

Standard	What does this mean in practice?
1. Well planned Clear purpose, scope and timeframes. Fit for purpose engagement methods and techniques.	Details have been outlined in an approved communications or project plan
2. Inclusive Diversity of people and views are included and respected throughout the engagement process.	Barriers to community engagement are identified and addressed
3. Coordinated Agencies have engaged and coordinated with each other before going out to communities. Opportunities for collaboration are sought where possible and appropriate.	An environmental scan of existing government projects is undertaken prior to any public engagement
4. Connected to decision-making Communities are clear on the level of engagement, why that level was chosen, how their engagement will impact on decision-making and how decisions will be made.	The level of influence the community may have over decision-making is clear and communicated
5. Genuine Engagement is sincere. All relevant information is shared and in plain English. It is clear what is up for negotiation and what is not.	Engagement is undertaken to create the best outcome possible; it is not a 'tick the box' exercise
6. Feedback Feedback to participants about the project is provided on a regular and ongoing basis. Feedback is provided on how community input influenced decision-making and what the outcome will be.	Feedback is provided as agreed with participants (eg within a certain timeframe, via email)

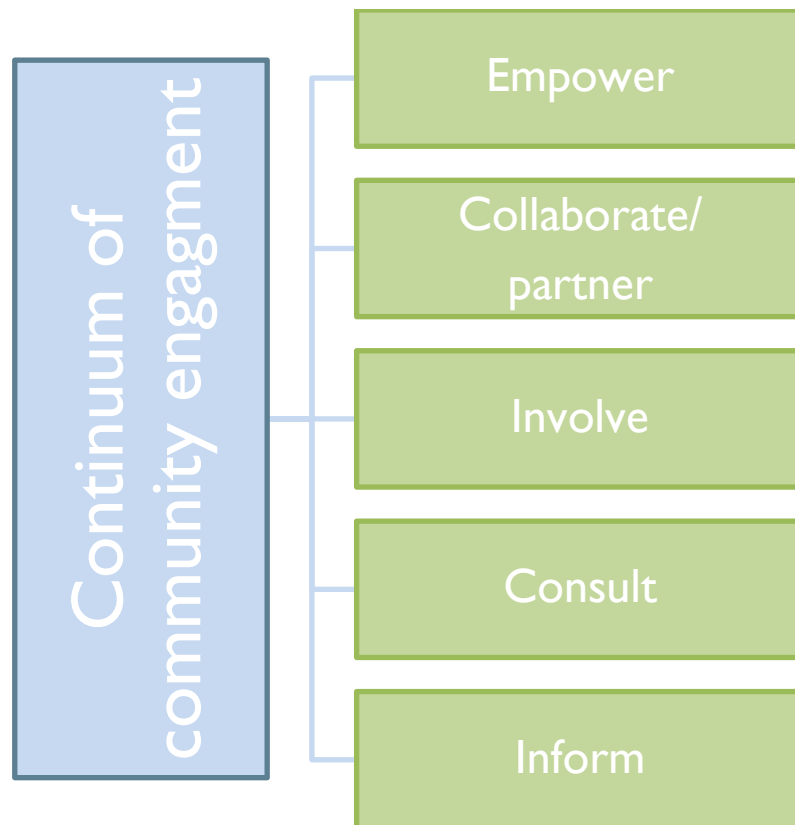
Standard	What does this mean in practice?
7. Time Engage early in the process. Allow enough time for the community to participate in the engagement process. Provide clear timeframes for feedback and project milestones. Engagement activities are held at a time that people can attend.	Careful consideration of all factors relating to timing.
8. Resources and skills People have the right training, skills, knowledge and attributes to facilitate effective engagement.	Employees have access to training or are able to work with experienced community engagement practitioners in government. ⁷
9. Learning and development Seek to continuously improve. A commitment to learn from experiences and share knowledge with the community and with other agencies as appropriate.	Being open to, and looking for, opportunities to share experiences with colleagues (eg story on agency Intranet) and integrate new knowledge into practice.
10. Monitoring and evaluation Engagement activities and processes will be evaluated and lessons learned will be shared with the community and other agencies.	Being open to, and looking for, opportunities to share information in a respectful and professional way.

These principles and standards align with the *Partnership Agreement between DHHS, DPAC and the Community Sector 2012-15* in Tasmania is available at www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/_data/.../PA_DHHS_DPAC_and_CS_v10_LR.pdf

⁷ Contact DPAC's Community Development Division on 1800 204 224 for further information.

3. CONTINUUM OF ENGAGEMENT

Engagement can be seen as a continuum, beginning at inform through to consult, involve, collaborate and empower.⁸

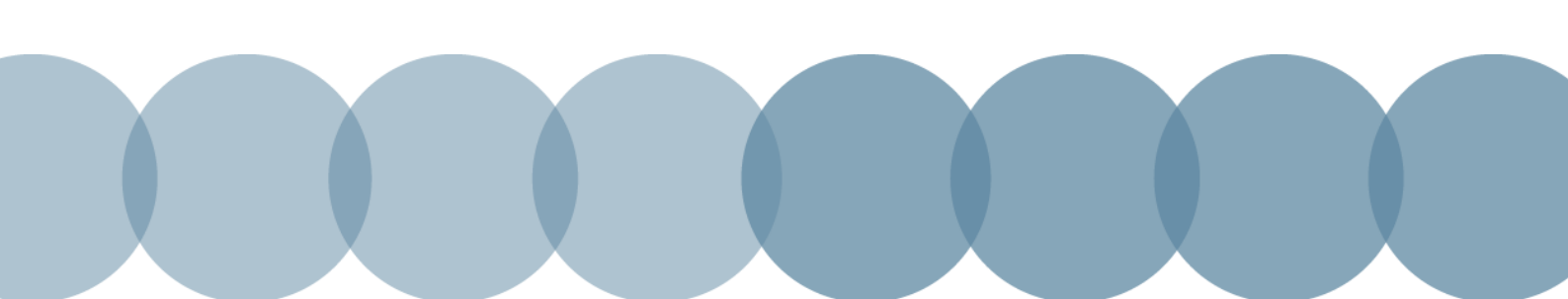


3.1 DECIDING ON HOW TO ENGAGE

It is important to decide on the purpose of engagement, how you will engage and what the benefits will be. Too little engagement can result in poor decisions, community frustration and distrust and too much can lead to inaction, consultation fatigue and a frustration that 'the Government should just get on with it!' A decision to engage with the community must balance the responsibility to get the job done.

The type of engagement chosen depends on the issue, scope, time/timing, public interest and available resources. This choice should consider the degree of influence the community can have, wants or expects over a decision and your ability to meet any expectations. Communicate and negotiate first with your internal stakeholders about the most appropriate form of engagement.

⁸ Among the various models of community engagement that have been developed, the Framework refers to the International Association of Public Participation's (IAP2) continuum of community engagement outcomes and techniques.



Be clear about what the engagement continuum means and requires and communicate this to engagement participants. This will help participants know what to expect during and after engagement, and what their role entails.

Engagement is not a linear process. It may also be necessary to move up and down the continuum of community engagement over the course of your project to allow the right people to be involved and the right decisions to be made. For example, an information campaign may require consultation if new issues arise or if the proposed options are rejected by the community.

Internal commitment

Once the nature of engagement has been decided, it will need to be authorised and approved within your agency. Ultimately, the significance of the project will determine who should sign off on the engagement methods chosen. Internal commitment is vital in ensuring that community engagement is successful and what you are doing is viewed as legitimate by your agency.

Commitment to the engagement process

“Be clear and honest about the type of engagement - don’t call it a consultation if it’s an information session.”

Community Member, Brighton

For each type of engagement a commitment to the process can be made to the community. This commitment can help to keep engagement on track and manage expectations through the engagement process.

Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate/ partner	Empower
Community engagement goal				
To provide the community with balanced, objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternative opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain community feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.	To work directly with the community throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.	To partner with the community in each aspect of the decision, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place the final decision in the hands of the community.
Commitment to the community				
We will keep you informed.	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations and provide feedback on how input influenced the decision.	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how your input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide.
Examples ⁹				
Websites, fact sheets, letters, media releases, signage and social media.	Targeted mail out, feedback, online surveys, submissions and meetings.	Facilitated workshops, forums, ideas and issue identification.	Partnerships, committees, meetings, grant funding, and reference groups.	Citizen juries, co-production, ¹⁰ participatory strategic planning, board members.

⁹ Examples are provided from Adelaide City Council Engagement Framework.

¹⁰ Co-production is about equal, reciprocal, respectful, trusting and purposeful relationships between decision-makers and those affected by decisions.



3.2 TYPES OF ENGAGEMENT

Inform

To provide the public with balanced, objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternative opportunities and/or solutions.

Government's engagement activities are often at the informing level.

When providing information it is important to identify who needs to be informed and how information should be tailored to that audience. It is also important to use a variety of methods to:

- ☐ ensure relevant, non-sensitive information is accessible in plain English or other formats that allow people with disability, low levels of literacy or English proficiency to engage (such as face-to-face meetings or Mp3 recordings);
- ☐ present an executive summary, or dot points about your project. Long documents can act as a deterrent to people engaging;
- ☐ let people know where they can access further information if they wish; and
- ☐ communicate with people in your department. Inconsistent information from departments creates confusion.

Opportunities for two-way engagement may be limited if the issue:

- ☐ is the general business of government;
- ☐ involves legislative responsibilities of government;
- ☐ involves confidential information; or
- ☐ needs immediate action.¹¹

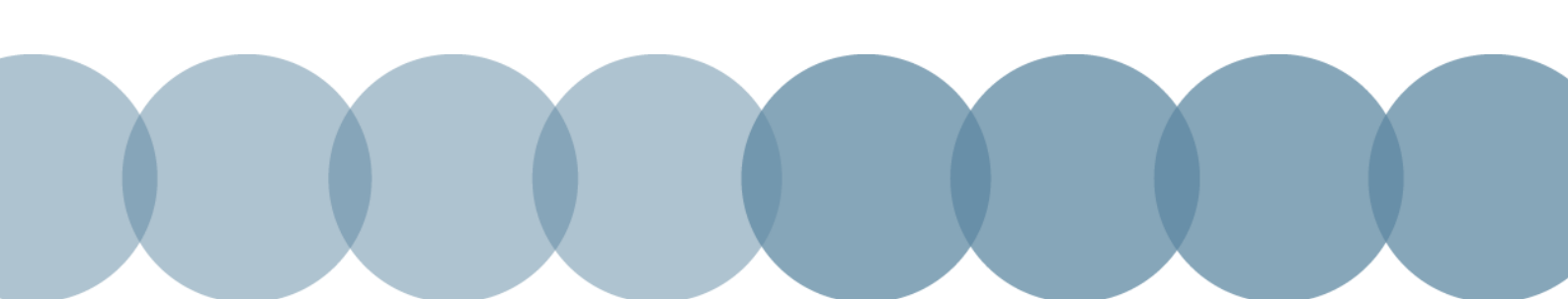
Consult

To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions.

Consultation provides the opportunity to develop two-way relationships between communities, individuals and government. This level is generally used to gather information, test options or seek feedback.

At this level, the government has the responsibility for making decisions.

¹¹ DEDTA, 2008, Engaging the Tasmanian Community Framework and Procedural Guidelines, p. 4



It is useful to consider using multiple techniques for consultation in your engagement strategy. For instance, face-to-face consultation sessions may be supported by an online survey. Successful consultation relies on:

- ☐ a clear purpose of engagement;
- ☐ the clear communication of what is up for negotiation and what is not;
- ☐ the right people being involved;
- ☐ participants being given enough time;
- ☐ timing of engagement is suited to most stakeholders;
- ☐ feedback being provided on the results of consultation;
- ☐ the ability to listen;
- ☐ opportunities for community input to influence or inform decisions made;
- ☐ all information being available and in plain English; and
- ☐ adequate resources being allocated to the process.

Involve

To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered.

Involving requires a higher level of participation and inclusion than consultation. This means that the Government includes participant feedback, concerns and issues in the options and solutions developed, and people are aware of how their input has influenced decisions.

To involve the community in decision-making process means that a method and process are employed to work directly with stakeholders.¹² However, as with 'consult', responsibility for the final decision rests with the Government. You should also ensure that:

- ☐ the level of influence over decision-making is clearly understood;
- ☐ a commitment is made by both parties to stay involved throughout the process; and
- ☐ consideration is given to whether a committee or advisory group is appropriate.

¹²Victorian Government (2013) Department of Environment and Sustainability
<http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/effective-engagement/developing-an-engagement-plan/types-of-engagement>



Collaborate/partner

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision making, including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

Collaboration requires a significant investment of time and commitment throughout the engagement and project management process. Collaboration deepens the level of participation by creating greater opportunities for shared or delegated decision-making. At this level the organisation undertaking engagement may still have responsibility for making decisions.

Collaborative partnerships can range from loose associations through to setting up of formal boards or committees. It is important to make clear:

- ☐ who has the ultimate power to make decisions;
- ☐ what level of commitment the project will involve;
- ☐ how decisions will be made; and
- ☐ governance arrangements.

For further information on collaboration across government, see DPAC's *Collaboration - a Tasmanian Government approach* at [www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/collaboration - a tasmanian government approach](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/policy/collaboration_-_a_tasmanian_government_approach)

Empower

To empower communities and stakeholders is to give them the authority to make decisions and, ultimately, responsibility for the outcomes of those decisions. If this level of engagement is chosen, it is vital that the people involved have the right skills, support and resources to enable them to succeed.

While it can be very challenging to hand over decision-making to the community, it can result in the best outcomes for the community in terms of developing community capacity.

It may be necessary to develop a Memorandum of Understanding between parties, to clarify and obtain formal agreement on the scope, goals, roles and responsibilities for the project.

Across the continuum of engagement, it is important to ensure that all information is in an accessible and easy to read format. This may include ensuring access to executive summaries and concise summaries of the issues and facts to accompany any other written documents.



4. PLANNING FOR ENGAGEMENT

While community engagement is simple in theory, it can be challenging for both community and the Government for a number of reasons. As a result successful engagement requires proper planning and internal commitment and recognition that one size does not fit all.

The engagement process can be as important as the project outcomes. For any project it is important to engage as early in the process as possible. Failure to engage early limits opportunities for community input and issue and risk identification. It may also compromise the quality of outcomes, who gets involved and whether there is goodwill in the community towards the project. The rules and processes of any engagement should be set out and clearly communicated to the community at the beginning.

A grievance procedure for engagement participants may be required, so that they know how to raise an issue if they believe the process for engagement has not been satisfactory. This will help to ensure accountability and inform your evaluation of your process. For instance, you may provide participants with an option to contact your Manager or Director should they wish to raise any issue or concern about your engagement approach.

Objectives

Determine a clear purpose and know what you want to get out of the engagement exercise. Make sure that you are engaging for the right reasons and using the methods that are going to be the most successful for what you hope to achieve.

Scoping the engagement

Being clear on the required level of engagement will help to set the context and scope for engagement. It is important to determine how the engagement process will benefit the project. At this point it is important to be clear about what decisions (if any) have been made and what requires further engagement and thought.

Addressing issues outside the scope of engagement

When engaging with a community, issues may be identified that are outside the scope of the project but may represent an alternative approach to finding a solution.

It is important to listen to all of the issues raised by community. Failure to hear and acknowledge what is going on for the community is disrespectful, can damage relationships, create distrust for the project and may impact on the overall project success.

Recording information that is outside the scope of a particular community engagement activity and referring these concerns to the relevant area in government lets people know how to progress their concerns through more appropriate channels. Likewise, it is important to respond to any referrals that you receive via any community engagement processes.



Communication

There are many useful tools to assist in this process that are available through your Agency's Communications Unit. Section 6 of this Framework also provides some useful information on helping you to plan communication for engagement.

Provide contact details to the community, so that they know how to find further information, have their questions answered or address concerns and issues outside of more public forums.

Choosing when and where to engage

Again, talk to local government, peak organisations and other key organisations or players in that community to find out the best time for and/or methods of engagement. These stakeholders can also provide useful information on who to engage.

However, it should be noted that while some communities may feel over-consulted and therefore may opt out (consultation fatigue), other communities may feel that they have been left out of engagement opportunities. For this reason, it is important to be aware of recent government engagement in that area or with that community. You may need to modify your engagement approach based on previous engagement activities in that community. One way of addressing this may be to make individual visits to people and services, rather than holding a meeting or forum.

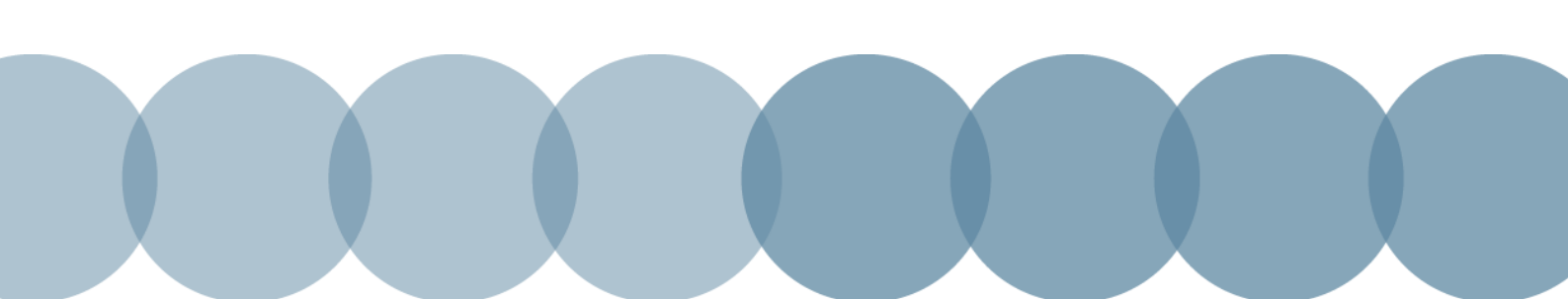
It is important to note that a region (North, South, North West, West Coast or East Coast) has not been “engaged” with by going to only one community in that region. One community within a region, or even one community in a local government area, does not speak for all communities. Communities in the same region can vary greatly in their social, economic, cultural and environmental issues.

Timing

Timeframes have a direct impact on who will be able to participate in engagement. An important factor in determining timeframes will be key community events such as school holidays, religious festivals and other major local events. To maximise the ability for people to participate, engagement activities you will need to consider the impact of these events on the community. As a general rule, it is best to avoid engagement activities through December and January.

The following questions can be used to help decide the timing of engagement:

- ☐ when are you undertaking engagement? How long for?
- ☐ are you affected by any deadlines? (end of financial year, contract obligations)
- ☐ what is the timeframe for making decisions?
- ☐ what is the timeframe for approval (Ministerial/agency)?
- ☐ will your project be affected by the electoral cycle?



Consider the times and dates that maximise the opportunities for engaging with communities on the ground, such as annual events like Mental Health Week, National Youth Week or AGFEST. You can also:

- ☐ allow enough time for people to have their say. This means allowing a six to eight week period for engagement;
- ☐ allow an extra two to four weeks if you are relying on an organisation to disseminate information to stakeholders/community members for you;
- ☐ consider the key target group and the hours in the day and months of the year that best suit them;
- ☐ provide enough notice: anything less than four weeks' notice reduces your time to involve people;
- ☐ take a more intensive approach if you do not have enough time to provide enough notice. This may involve directly approaching and visiting individuals; and
- ☐ provide opportunities for engagement outside business hours so that working people can attend.

How decisions will be made

Many community members feel that there is a lack of accessibility to decision makers. It is important to communicate how decisions will be made, who is responsible for making them and how the questions about the initiative or the engagement process can be raised.

Skills

Adequate skills and resources are essential to undertake quality engagement. It is vital you have a facilitator with the right skills, knowledge and personal attributes to engage effectively.

Each engagement method requires different levels of practitioner skill, time and budget. For controversial projects, it may be necessary to use an independent facilitator.

Choosing a consultant

For some engagement projects, it may be preferable to employ a consultant or facilitator. This facilitator may be a professional consultant, or a council or other non-government employee with the required skills who is able to work well with the community.

A consultant should generally not be employed in lieu of a State Servants to inform communities or stakeholders about key government decisions, especially if they are sensitive or controversial in nature. However, where the Government may have a conflict of interest, an independent consultant may be better placed to undertake the associated engagement activities, document the process and balance all considerations.

To ensure the consultant is independent you may choose to assess the suitability of the facilitator in conjunction with the key stakeholders involved in the project.



Budget

Consider how much the community engagement phase of your project will cost. This will largely be determined by:

- ☐ the scope and size of the project;
- ☐ the level of engagement determined;
- ☐ the communication and engagement methods chosen; and/or
- ☐ whether there are any legislative requirements.

Generally the higher the level of impact the project will have, and the higher the number of stakeholders involved, the more resources required. Beyond the general communication costs, such as Public Notices, other relevant advertisements and the production of hard copy information, you should also consider any costs that relate to:

- ☐ accommodation
- ☐ addressing barriers for participants (reimbursements, childcare, transport)
- ☐ catering
- ☐ facilitation
- ☐ incentives (prizes for participation)
- ☐ materials to be used in engagement sessions or other promotion
- ☐ promotion
- ☐ transport
- ☐ travel allowance
- ☐ venue hire.

Feedback

Generally, anyone who has participated in engagement will want, and should expect, feedback about what happened to their input - even if the project has been put on hold.

When planning for engagement, you should consider how best to provide feedback, so that all stakeholders are informed. It is important to be flexible and responsive as possible in providing feedback and other information to your stakeholders. You will also need to be able to manage and analyse the quality and quantity of feedback that you receive. Additional resources and staff assistance may be required if you receive a lot of feedback.

Also, feedback and information gained from engagement activities should be fed back into agencies, where appropriate, to avoid duplicating community engagement processes.

Providing feedback at the end of the engagement process and project delivery is vital, so that community influence or disappointment can be acknowledged and both governments and communities can move on.



Project Management

The community engagement stage of your project will most likely sit within a broader project management framework. For a full range of templates and information resources to assist with developing and managing your project, visit www.egovernment.tas.gov.au

You will need to be clear on how the engagement component of your project relates to your higher level project aims, timeframes and milestones.

Engaging outside the process

From time to time, engagement on or about an issue or project may occur outside the process you have set. This may be due to the level of controversy associated with the project, or may be due to chance or opportunity. Engagement outside the process may be driven by the community or an individual (through letter writing or even an organised rally, for example), or your project may end up being the focus of a non-related engagement exercise.

Some people and communities feel more comfortable or empowered to raise an issue with a politician, rather than the relevant government agency and, in some cases, this has been very effective. Politicians and politics often impact on the community engagement process and outcomes, and it is important to be mindful and prepared about how this may affect your project. Be sure to adequately brief the relevant Minister.

The Framework is a resource for Tasmanian Government agencies and it is not intended to be applied to elected Members of Parliament.



5. UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES

“Different communities have different needs. It’s important to note that there is significant variance, diversity, division and differences within and between communities. It is very important to avoid assumptions and stereotypes.”

Community Member, Geeveston

To effectively engage it is important to have an understanding of the community and challenge any assumptions you may have. Find out and use local information about the community to take an evidence-based approach to planning your engagement. You may choose to access information by:

- ☐ learning from the experience of other engagement activities;
- ☐ contacting other Tasmanian Government agencies or other work areas in your agency to find out about any existing reports, policies or related projects;
- ☐ accessing data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the State Infrastructure Planning System (SIPS) or other agencies;
- ☐ talking to local government, peak organisations and other key organisations or players in that community; and/or
- ☐ taking the time to attend meetings, events and functions.

For many communities, it may be worth approaching key community members to co-design your engagement strategy.

Value community

Understand and respect the skills and knowledge that all parties bring to the table. Respect that the people believe what is true for them and that they may have the answers for what needs to be done in their communities. People who engage with government are giving up their time, energy and knowledge. It is important that they are appreciated.

Community perspective

Find out how people in the community view the issue. They may have a perspective that is different from but equally as valid as that of the decision makers. Place value on the experience and insights of community in helping to identify and understand local issues or priorities.

Start to understand how the community and relevant stakeholders may respond to your project. Based on what you know about the community, will they be interested, outraged, hard to engage or enthusiastic?

There may be many views within a community. Some community members may be more able and confident to voice their opinions. It may be necessary to meet with vocal individuals on a one-on-one basis to hear their concerns. It may also help to identify well regarded community members to help mediate and facilitate open engagement.



Building relationships

Engagement and communication should not only occur when there is a burning issue to be solved. Open and consistent engagement with the community is essential to building good relationships.

It is important to realise that relationships take time. Going to meet with a community once is not enough to establish a relationship. People need to know and trust who they are dealing with. This helps people to feel comfortable with each other and fosters a sense of accountability.

Building relationships may involve:

- ☐ acknowledging community priorities and issues, even if they are outside the scope of engagement;
- ☐ attending community meetings and regularly meeting with stakeholders;
- ☐ giving thanks to those in the community who participate and helped to facilitate engagement;
- ☐ leaving enough time to allow for informal discussion after the engagement activity;
- ☐ making issues personally meaningful;
- ☐ providing appropriate incentives such as food and refreshments, vouchers, reimbursement of expenses etc;
- ☐ recognising and respecting community input; and
- ☐ visiting the organisations that are funded through your agency.

Relationships rely on continuity and commitment. It is important to realise that changes in staff may unravel good relationships.

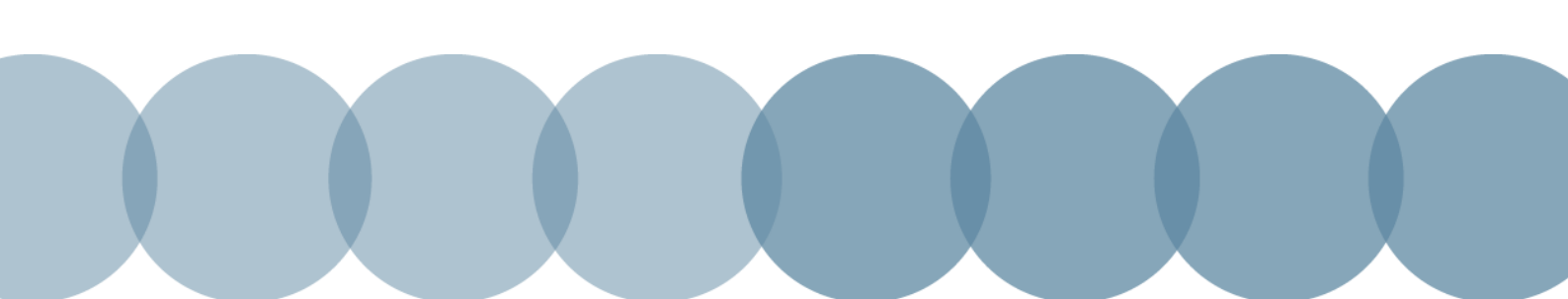
Managing emotion and conflict

To manage conflict effectively, be clear on the purpose of your engagement and the broader project, in relation to the roles, influence and concerns of the stakeholders. Ultimately you are engaging to ensure the best outcomes for your project and the best outcomes for the community. It is important that you do not lose sight of this.

People believe deeply in the importance of what they are doing, the causes they fight for and protecting the rights and resources of those they care about. When people engage in issues that are emotional, highly technical, controversial, complex or unfamiliar, they may experience feelings of anxiety, fear, defensiveness, frustration, lack of control or anger.¹³

To minimise the impact of intense emotions, ground rules can be developed with participants prior to engagement. Being able to refer participants back to the ground rules that they helped to create can help to deal with conflict in a respectful way and reduce the likelihood of personal attacks.

¹³International Association for Public Participation, 2006, *Student manual, Planning for Effective Public Participation*, page 62



Not dealing with a person's emotions during engagement can lead to wider conflict among participants. You can manage an emotionally charged situation by:

- ☐ letting the person express their anger and concerns in a way that is safe for others;
- ☐ listening to them without interrupting, being defensive or arguing with them;
- ☐ respecting their opinion;
- ☐ realising it is not a personal attack;
- ☐ asking questions to clarify their feelings and concerns;
- ☐ find out what is important to them (values);
- ☐ summarise what you have heard and seek their confirmation you understand;
- ☐ ask what they would like done to address their concerns.;
- ☐ agree to a timeframe for when concerns will be addressed or refer the matter on;
- ☐ commit to providing feedback at an agreed time; and
- ☐ see if you can reframe the issue.¹⁴

Finding out the core values and priorities that communities hold can assist in finding common ground and reducing conflict. Understanding these values can help you to appreciate where community members are coming from and what type of outcomes they seek. These priorities and values may be anything from safety, health and wellbeing to having a sense of place, having a job or something for their young people to do.¹⁵

If a particular issue is very emotive or controversial, it is best to select engagement techniques that do not allow people to behave in a confrontational way. For instance, it may be best to avoid public meetings and opt for a series of small group discussion or one-on-one interviews before bringing selected stakeholders together to discuss solutions and/or options. For controversial projects, find ways to engage with community members and groups outside of key stakeholders and balance broader communities responses with the responses of prominent stakeholders. However, it is important to be aware that individual community members and groups may not be as informed or as invested as key stakeholders - clear and objective communication is crucial.

¹⁴ Ibid p.63

¹⁵ International Association for Public Participation, 2006, Student manual, *Planning for Effective Public Participation*, p. 20.



Lack of engagement

In contrast to managing conflict, some communities may be apathetic about a particular issue, or may tend not to engage when there is an opportunity to do so. Apathy may be a result of:

- ☐ previous engagement exercises that have been unsuccessful;
- ☐ failure (or repeated failure) to address barriers to engagement (either through deliberate action or unawareness of barriers);
- ☐ low interest in a particular issue/project;
- ☐ low feelings of efficacy in the community;
- ☐ low levels of trust in the government and public sector; and/or
- ☐ people who are too busy in their own lives to participate in an issue they view will not affect them.

There may be a perception that a community is apathetic in response to low participation and engagement rates. This may result in a tendency to label communities as apathetic, rather than reflecting on the engagement strategy or practices chosen, how the issue has been framed or the personal circumstances and capacity of an individual ¹⁶

However, it is also important to note that government agencies are not alone in having difficulty engaging with communities. Many local associations, groups and clubs may experience low levels of engagement within their own community due to complex and multiple barriers to engagement or lack of interest.

Understanding the community, how it has responded to previous engagement activities and finding out who the key figures are in the community, will help you to inform the type of, or method of, engagement you choose. As mentioned earlier, it may be appropriate to co-design your engagement strategy with key members or the community, or with organisations that have a good understanding of how that community works.

¹⁶ Dave Meslin: (2011) *The antidote to apathy*, cited by Craig Thomler *eGovernment and Gov 2.0 thoughts and speculations from an Australian perspective* <http://egovau.blogspot.com.au/2013/06/do-government-agencies-and-councils.html>



Third parties

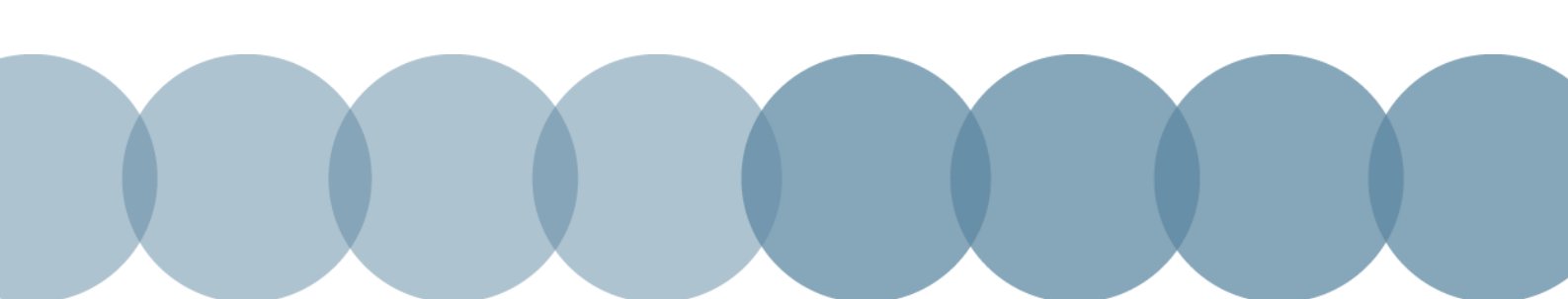
It may also be appropriate for you to work with third parties, such as local government or a peak organisation, to distribute information about your engagement, or even facilitate engagement on your behalf. This may be appropriate if;

- ☐ you have a good relationship with the third party;
- ☐ they have access to the people you are trying to reach;
- ☐ you are seeking similar information;
- ☐ you can coordinate with the third party on existing engagement activities;
- ☐ the organisation is funded by government to engage;
- ☐ your audience will be more open with a third party; and
- ☐ your project has mutual benefits.

Identifying barriers

Some people may want to engage in a particular issue but don't know where to start, or they may experience multiple obstacles that prevent or deter them from engaging, such as:

- ☐ bureaucratic language that is difficult to understand;
- ☐ chaotic lives;
- ☐ chronic pain;
- ☐ confusion over which level of government is responsible for what;
- ☐ cultural issues;
- ☐ family commitments (taking care of elderly parents or children);
- ☐ family violence;
- ☐ fear of negative consequences from voicing opinions (especially in small communities);
- ☐ fear of speaking in public;
- ☐ fear of taking on responsibility;
- ☐ homelessness;
- ☐ inaccurate information or perceptions about the issue;
- ☐ inadequate access to technology, or limited skills;
- ☐ lack of access to information or not well enough informed;
- ☐ lack of childcare;
- ☐ lack of confidence;
- ☐ lack of money;
- ☐ lack of literacy skills;
- ☐ lack of language skills;
- ☐ mental health issues;

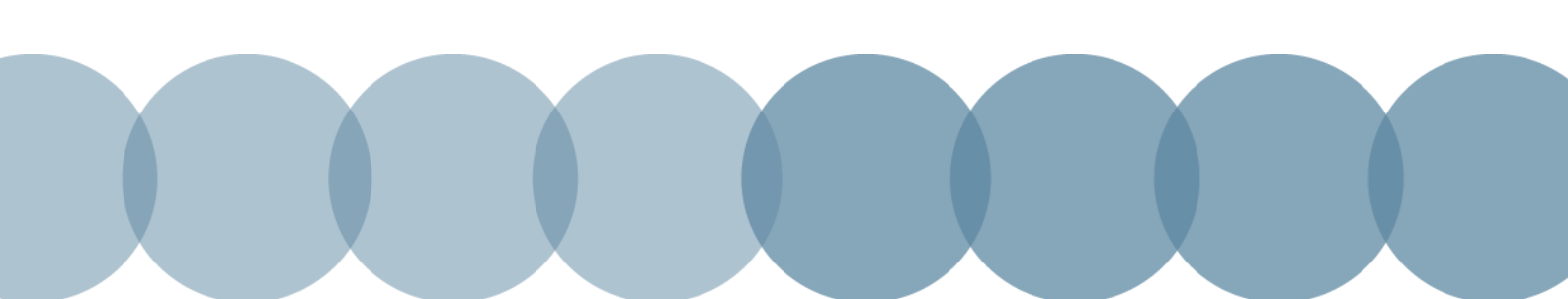
- 
- ☐ negative or unsatisfactory previous experiences;
 - ☐ not knowing that they have the opportunity to engage;
 - ☐ people are unwilling to participate as they feel distanced from government;
 - ☐ people do not feel connected to the issue;
 - ☐ people have not felt listened to in the past and feel they won't get a return for their time;
 - ☐ social and geographical isolation;
 - ☐ time constraints;
 - ☐ transient people in communities;
 - ☐ transport; and/or
 - ☐ work commitments.

Despite the best intentions to engage as genuinely and inclusively as possible, failure to adequately identify and address barriers may be viewed by community members as a deliberate strategy to avoid including particular community members and other stakeholders.

Addressing barriers

It is important to take a non-judgemental approach to why some people and communities experience particular barriers. By acknowledging and addressing barriers to engagement, more effective engagement is possible. For instance you can:

- ☐ ensure all documentation and communication is in plain language;
- ☐ communicate through, social media, local publications and radio;
- ☐ contact people in the community who will spread the word for you and let you know who else you should talk to. Follow-up with them and see what the interest has been;
- ☐ where possible, cover the costs of attending;
- ☐ engage people through a range of methods (phone calls, emails and face to face visits);
- ☐ give people enough notice to make arrangements to attend;
- ☐ inform the community and key stakeholders of issues before engagement happens (through local government, neighbourhood houses, schools and local associations);
- ☐ let people know who they can contact for further information;
- ☐ where possible and relevant, make interpreters available;
- ☐ provide food and refreshments as an incentive;
- ☐ provide childcare;
- ☐ provide transport;

- 
- ☐ acknowledge RSVPs and send reminders out;
 - ☐ select venues that communities use, where they feel comfortable, safe and welcome;
 - ☐ be flexible and allow for engagement beyond one visit or forum or beyond business hours; and
 - ☐ understanding the people and issues in the community.

Inclusive engagement

The Government understands that in any community, there are some people who face complex and multiple and/or particular challenges in their lives.

Whether an individual or community is difficult to engage with or 'hard-to-reach' should not compromise the effort made to engage. No community is too hard to work with. However, many communities that may not be ready for engagement and need support and innovative approaches to enable voices to be heard.

As a guide to engaging with individuals and communities that do not generally engage due to the barriers that they face, you will need to:

- ☐ consider collaborating with organisations that work in the community or are connected with the people that you are trying to reach;
- ☐ realise that effective engagement will require additional time and commitment to build trust and mutually respectful relationships. This amount of time may be difficult to anticipate;
- ☐ make the effort to go where people are. Do not expect them to come to you. Be prepared to make personal visits and work with community members one-on-one and be responsive to the needs of that individual or community;
- ☐ identify and work with motivated and connected people in the community that can help to make connections with people who do not ordinarily engage;
- ☐ make sure your approach is warm, friendly and non-judgemental. Engage in a way that is personally meaningful. Be prepared to acknowledge personal experiences. Listen to concerns, issues or problems. Be aware that these issues may be serious and you may not have the appropriate skills to help the person or deal with the issue. Professional help may be required. Make sure you refer them to someone who can help;¹⁷
- ☐ manage your own expectations and the expectations of the people you are reaching out to;
- ☐ acknowledge the unique circumstances of hard-to-reach groups in any community engagement plan and the engagement methods chosen. Particular barriers that people face may mean that standard engagement methods (such as public meetings, workshops, email or other online forums) may not work; and

¹⁷ Capire Consulting Group Pty Ltd

- 
- value people's time as you value your own. Follow-up and provide feedback.

In realisation of the commitment to inclusive engagement, it is very important to note that the Government, community and individuals all contribute to the quality of engagement and resulting outcomes. As there is often a power imbalance in the Government's favour, efforts must be made to ensure the engagement process enables people to contribute.

Interaction with agencies

Interaction with government agencies can be problematic and frustrating for community members. The point of contact within an agency has a significant impact on a person's perception of the Government. Many community members feel that it is difficult to find the right person. If people cannot speak to who they need to, they may not pursue their issues because it is perceived as being too difficult. If a State Servant is not helpful or unable to point them in the right direction the community member may feel disempowered, unheard, frustrated and/or develop negative feelings towards the Government.

Hobart-centric perspective

There is a feeling from communities and some State Servant that there is a lack of understanding about realities for communities outside the Hobart area. This may impact on the quality of policy advice that is provided, and consequently has issues for planning and coordinating engagement activities. To minimise a potential negative impact it is important to:

- make the time to discuss issues and how to approach engagement with colleagues in regional areas prior to engagement;
- be aware of local issues;
- contact other agencies to avoid duplication and consultation fatigue in communities; and
- attend community and area network meetings that are held outside of Hobart when possible.



Consultation fatigue

Failure by the Government to coordinate community engagement activities can be a burden on the limited resources of the community sector. Community organisations and local government tell us that providing regular input to government and other consultations can lead to consultation fatigue. When this is combined with a lack of transparency in engagement processes and a lack of feedback about how input has influenced decision-making, this can lead to frustrations.

Consultation fatigue can also be caused by:

- ☐ no demonstrable outcomes being evident post-engagement. People want and expect action, not just engagement;
- ☐ government initiatives going nowhere;
- ☐ over engaging;
- ☐ little or no coordination being evident between government agencies, government and community organisations or between Ministers and government agencies; or
- ☐ a strong position is adopted by the community but is ignored by government.

Media

People are often informed of, and rely on receiving information on issues through the media and therefore opt out of public and other forums. This means that the full picture of the issue may not be presented. In addition, the way that issues are presented in the media can also impact on whether the community will engage. For instance, if a debate is sensationalised, certain stakeholders are generating attention, or if only one side of the story is being told people may be put off from engagement.



6. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

It is important to distinguish between *stakeholder engagement* and *community engagement*. Stakeholders are members of the community that are formally or directly affected by an issue or decision. These may include:¹⁸

- ☐ campaign groups and campaigners
- ☐ community and voluntary organisations and their representatives
- ☐ community leaders and representatives
- ☐ educational institutions
- ☐ local government
- ☐ members of industry or the business community
- ☐ other government agencies
- ☐ peak bodies and associations
- ☐ professionals in the field
- ☐ regulatory or enforcement agencies
- ☐ scientists and researchers.

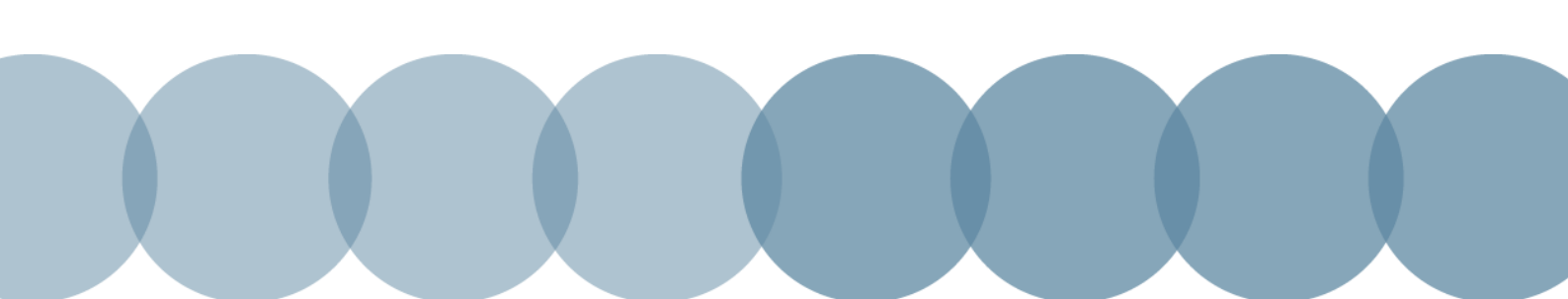
Stakeholder identification and communication should be done in the project development stage, as well as on an ongoing basis. As issues are identified throughout the project, the requirements of the community or project may change. For this reason, ongoing stakeholder identification may be necessary.

Stakeholder identification

Formalised stakeholder groups, such as peak associations, are often the first point of contact for engagement activities. They are often easier to identify (and may even self-identify) and communicate with, due to their professional or political interest and links to established networks. For this reason, some stakeholders are, or are perceived to be, more connected to decision-making and are given higher levels of influence than the general community.

Government has a responsibility to identify and communicate with anyone who is likely to be affected by a project. It can be difficult to engage with people that aren't attached to an association or organisation and appropriate communication methods will need to be implemented (refer to Section 6). Consider any existing opportunities for identifying stakeholders through networking and going to places where people are already meeting and coming together (community meetings, expos and other events).

¹⁸ People and Participation.net <http://www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Involve/Home>



Keeping accurate and up-to-date databases for community contacts and other key stakeholders that are associated with your project has a wider corporate value. You may find that it is worth contacting other agencies, or even business units or divisions in your agency to see if they have lists of stakeholders that may be relevant to your project.

Peak bodies

Tasmania has many peak bodies that advocate for, and provide the Government with, their expertise and knowledge about the stakeholders they represent. Peak bodies also support engagement with community groups, through their existing networks and connections within a particular sector. It is vital to have a good working relationship with peak bodies, as they are well placed to advise you on how to engage with a particular cohort – or they may even undertake engagement on your behalf.

Collaboration across government agencies can be important when engaging with peak bodies, both to minimise the demands on the peak body and to ensure a coordinated approach to policy and project development for a particular sector or population group.

Peak bodies are asked to engage their membership on a range of issues, particularly to provide feedback on policies and programs. As with other community or sector organisations, resources are often limited and their capacity to engage their membership at short notice can be challenging.

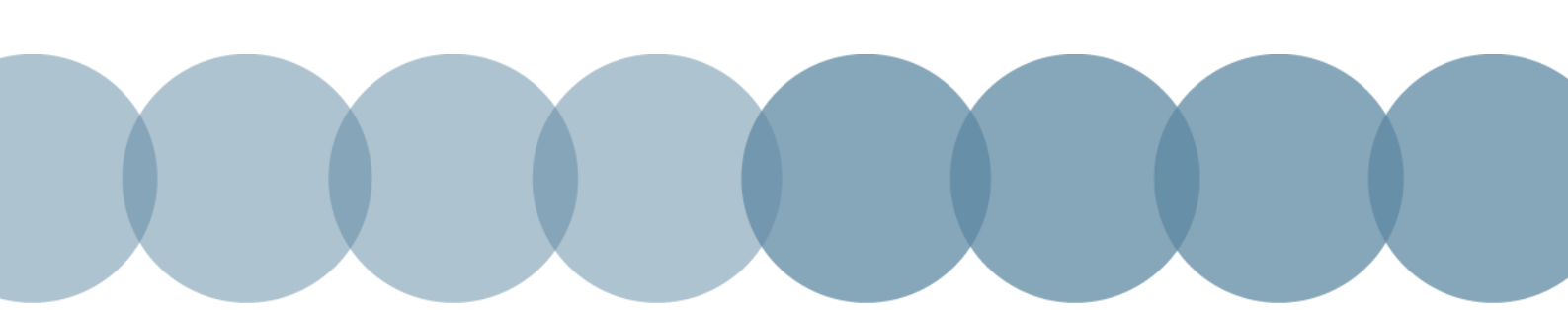
Before engaging with a peak body, check to see what other information they have already provided to the Government in the form of budget submissions, existing reports or responses to other engagement exercises.

Digging deeper into the community

When an issue will impact on a whole community it should not be assumed that the response of a representative group is enough. Many issues require engagement with the broader community to ensure that it is not just those with the most obvious connection to an issue. Ensuring the voices of stakeholders are heard across sectors may help to create more informed, inclusive and integrated approaches that benefit the community.

When identifying stakeholders and engaging with the community you should:

- ☐ determine who is your main audience;
- ☐ look to involve influential community leaders and members who are well placed to connect with others in the community. Identify if any other government agencies have engaged with that community in the last six months. See what their experience has been and who they have been contacted;
- ☐ contact the municipal council in that area to ensure that existing organisations/community groups are included, where relevant;
- ☐ call and follow-up with people individually and allow time to talk to them outside the forum you have organised;

- 
- ☐ take an inclusive approach. Do not make assumptions that an organisation, group or individual is not interested in, or does not have any knowledge or expertise to offer on a specific issue; and
 - ☐ if possible, allow people to self-identify as stakeholders and “work with the willing”.

You can also consider contacting State Servants who work and/or live, in that community for advice.

At this point you will need to determine what level of engagement you will apply to particular stakeholders. For some it may be appropriate to keep them informed, for others you may seek ongoing feedback and other stakeholders may have a more “hands on” involvement.

The following points invite you to consider how you relate to and how you have identified your stakeholders:

- ☐ what type of engagement will the community and/or stakeholders expect to have? Is there the opportunity to ask your stakeholders what level of influence they expect to have?
- ☐ some stakeholder groups or individuals have more access to or are known to Government already, those that aren't may require support to engage.
- ☐ are you allocating more power to individual stakeholders in comparison to others? Whose opinions are valued most and why?
- ☐ are you best placed to engage with this community or would it be wiser to handover the community engagement component of your project to a more appropriate organisation or facilitator?
- ☐ do you have a diverse range of stakeholders?
- ☐ are your stakeholders involved in any other projects, or have an agenda that may represent a conflict of interest?
- ☐ do you need to include stakeholders that may be outside the sector?
- ☐ do you accept accountability for the representativeness of your stakeholders and how they have been included in the engagement process?



Stakeholder management

There can be a tension between ensuring engagement is broad enough to include a range of communities, sectors and interests versus targeting a specific audience.

Often the people who are willing to participate most are the people with a strong, but not necessarily representative view. Some people may dominate meetings and engagement sessions and prevent or deter others from raising their views.

There are number of practical steps in successfully managing stakeholders and stakeholders issues including:

- ☐ keeping a list of your stakeholders with up-to-date contact details;
- ☐ providing regular feedback and project updates at agreed times;
- ☐ meeting with stakeholders individually where appropriate and possible;
- ☐ understanding what is driving stakeholder motivations; and
- ☐ looking for ways to hear views of those who are reluctant to voice their concerns and opinions in public forums. This may need to occur outside of formal engagement sessions.



7. COMMUNICATION FOR ENGAGEMENT

Clear communication about the engagement process and what participants can expect is crucial. It is vital that you contact your Agency's Communication Unit in the planning stages of your project.

Effective communication includes both the general promotion of engagement opportunities and any related issues. Failure to communicate engagement opportunities or any emerging or urgent issues associated with a project, has the potential to negatively impact on a community or impact on stakeholder relationships.¹⁹

Tasmanian Government Communications Policy

The *Tasmanian Government Communications Policy* (the Communications Policy) aims to ensure effective communication between the Tasmanian Government and the people of Tasmania. The Cabinet-approved policy was first developed in 2003 to ensure that Tasmanians could participate actively and meaningfully in the democratic process. It was updated in 2009-10 to reflect the rapidly changing communication environment.

Community engagement is firmly within the scope of the Communications Policy. Specifically, the policy defines communications as including interaction and engagement with the public including the use of collaborative communication channels.²⁰ It asserts that:

It is the policy of the Tasmanian Government that all its communications activities encourage public engagement through the provision of information and consultation. The Government has a responsibility to ensure that accurate and relevant information about its policies, programs and services is disseminated or made available to the public in a timely manner. Government should also engage openly and responsively by seeking and considering public input and feedback when establishing priorities and planning or reviewing its activities.

The Policy is managed by the Communications and Marketing Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, and it is the role of agency communications managers – or their equivalents – to ensure adherence to the policy while coordinating and supporting effective communication by their agency. The communications procedures and methods covered by the Policy, including advertising, publications, public events and websites, are commonly utilised in community engagement. Therefore, agency communications staff should be relied upon to support engagement activities as part of the communications function.²¹

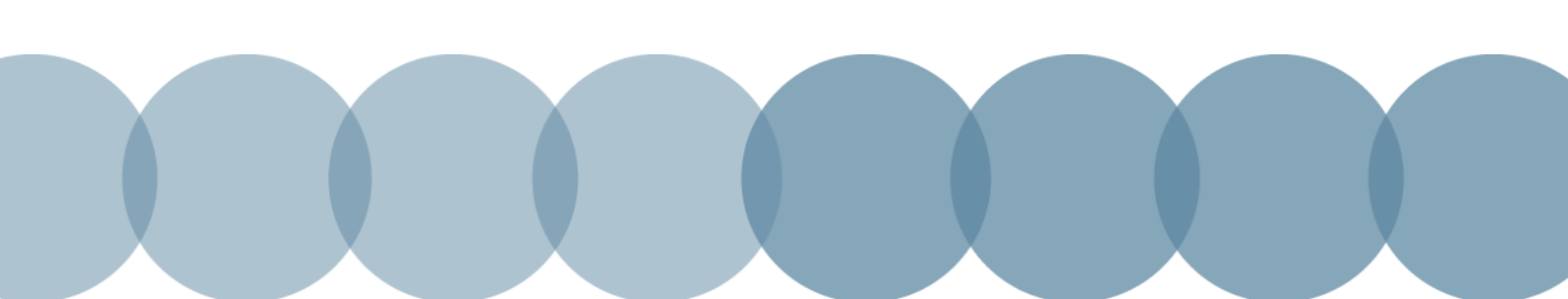
The Communications Policy is supported by a range of related guidelines and resources, such as the *Tasmanian Government Style Guide and Logo Policy*, to assist agencies to meet the requirements of the Communications Policy and deliver best practice communications.

Communication methods

¹⁹ DPAC, 2010, *Tasmanian Government Communications Policy* p.17

²⁰ Tasmanian Government, *Communications Policy*, Second Edition, September 2010 p. 4

²¹ Ibid, p.7



Emails, social media, websites, newspapers, newsletters, word-of-mouth, advertisements and public notices are common ways that the Government communicates with the community. However, no one method should be relied upon solely.

Many different communication methods can be effective, depending on the geographic area, the purpose and who you want to target. Suggestions include:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bulk mail outs | <input type="checkbox"/> local and major newspapers |
| <input type="checkbox"/> childcare/school newsletters | <input type="checkbox"/> niche publications |
| <input type="checkbox"/> displays in community and neighbourhood centres/houses | <input type="checkbox"/> networks of interest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> doctor surgeries, hospitals and community health centres | <input type="checkbox"/> personalised invitations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> email and email networks | <input type="checkbox"/> phone calls |
| <input type="checkbox"/> face-to-face | <input type="checkbox"/> posters in shop windows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> find local champions or relevant service providers to assist | <input type="checkbox"/> presentation at meetings (parents and friends, service provider meetings, progress associations, service clubs) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> flyers | <input type="checkbox"/> public notices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> through committees and community organisations | <input type="checkbox"/> radio advertisements and broadcasts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agency intranets | <input type="checkbox"/> TV news shows |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Internet and websites | <input type="checkbox"/> Service Tasmania |
| <input type="checkbox"/> letter/newsletter drops | <input type="checkbox"/> word of mouth |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> via third parties. |

Email is often an easy and preferred way of communication. However, it is important to be aware that households that are without a computer or Internet access may be excluded from opportunities to engage. Also it is not uncommon for emails to be unintentionally deleted or left unread.

Communication planning

A perceived lack of communication from the Government to the community about engagement opportunities is a significant issue and challenge. Communities can feel that there is often not enough engagement or publicity for engagement opportunities.



To address this a communication plan must be developed to outline the:

- ☐ clear messages about the reason for engagement;
- ☐ the target audience (stakeholder analysis); and
- ☐ effective communication channels.

More than one channel of communication can be used. Depending on the project and legislative requirements, this may include a mix of public notices, emailing networks, websites, phone calls, face to face meetings, teleconferences, meetings with existing networks and groups and visits to the community, prior to the project engagement phase.

Local media (newspapers, council newsletters and radio) can also be very effective and help to reach people who may not be connected to existing community networks. It is important to test and discuss the communication methods that you have chosen with key contacts in the community. These contacts may be able to assist you communicate your message, or may know people or opportunities that can help you to achieve your communication goals. Community development officers in local government and neighbourhood house coordinators are an excellent example of this. However, it is important to be mindful that many service providers are very busy and may be limited in their ability to get the word out.

It can also be helpful to coordinate with relevant organisations at the local level. For instance, it could be as simple as including a couple of additional questions in your survey to help gather information for another agency or organisation.



8. MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AND ISSUES

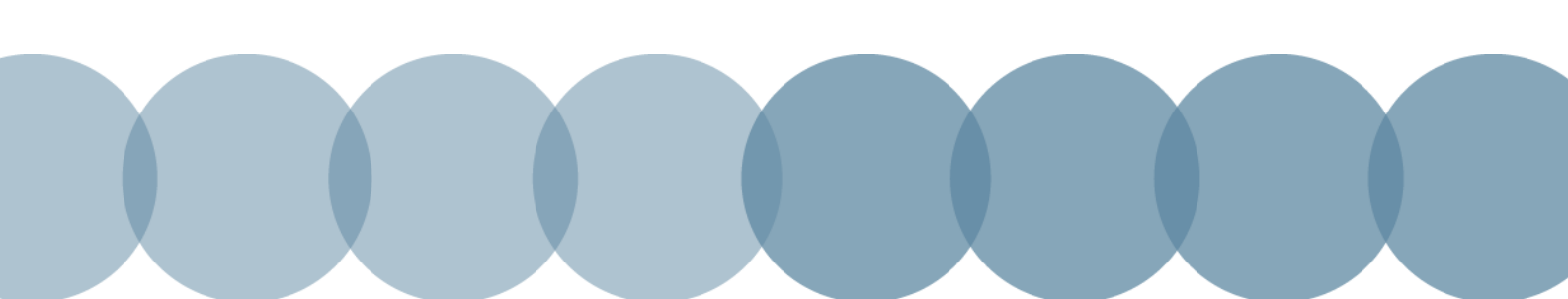
Managing expectations is an important part of the engagement process. At times, community expectations may be too great for the Government to meet or unrealistic to achieve, irrespective of the level of community engagement undertaken. It is important to understand that generally there is no Government decision that will please everyone, especially if that issue is emotive, complex or controversial. However, best efforts must be made to consider community concerns and ideas.

The community has an expectation that engagement (beyond informing) will be used to inform decision-making. It is important then, to report back to the community on how their input was considered in the decision-making process. It is also important to clearly communicate to community:

- ☐ the purpose for engagement;
- ☐ the project's scope;
- ☐ the resources available;
- ☐ the limitations and constraints;
- ☐ the level of engagement (how much influence the community has over the decision);
- ☐ how decisions will be made;
- ☐ what decisions have already been made, or are likely to be made and why;
- ☐ the community engagement process and any changes to the process as they occur;
- ☐ the timeframes for feed back to the community. Be clear on who is going to report back and when;
- ☐ information about the project throughout the process;
- ☐ outcomes of the engagement; and
- ☐ clear timeframes around engagement and when decisions will be made.

Similar to addressing issues outside the scope of engagement (page 15), it is constructive to mention what you are not there to do, so you are clear about expectations.

It is important to realise that when an issue or concern is raised by the community, the Government may not be in a position to do anything about it, due to a lack of resources, other competing priorities or because it does not have the authority. If this is the case, do not over-promise and under-deliver. Monitor the engagement process and if community expectations are not being met, modify your approach. You may need to meet with stakeholders to ensure that expectations are reasonable.



It is important to recognise that it is easier to manage expectations at the providing information end of the community engagement continuum, with it becoming more challenging as engagement moves into consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment. This means that honesty is paramount and it is very important to continue to clarify expectations and ensure engagement participants are kept up-to-date on how the project is progressing.

Government expectations

State Servants and Ministers also need to manage their own expectations in terms of how successful and constructive the engagement process is and whether the advice and information gathered is representative of the community or able to influence the decision-making process. To manage its own expectations, Government needs to:

- ☐ understand the community;
- ☐ know what it can realistically do;
- ☐ have internal commitment to act;
- ☐ analyse the benefits of engagement in the first place; and
- ☐ assess the risks of engagement.



9. ENGAGEMENT METHODS AND TOOLS

9.1 ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Once the type of community engagement has been determined, it is time to choose the engagement techniques or methods that best suit your audience and will give people options on how they engage.

You may choose to use more than one method of engagement to make the process more flexible and accessible.

The following descriptions of engagement methods are only examples. For more detailed information about the following examples and other engagement methods and techniques you can refer to *Your Care, Your Say* at

http://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/about_the_department/your_care_your_say

For more examples on informing see Communication methods on page 34.

Methods to inform and consult

Briefings

Briefings are often a way of providing information on a specific issue or initiative to a special audience. The presentation may be delivered by an industry, government or organisation's representative, and is typically followed by detailed discussions in a question and answer format.

Social media

Social media can provide a way to:

- ☐ consult with specific communities on current or planned policies, programs or services;
- ☐ deliver or support direct services, programs and more;
- ☐ enable better communication between government agencies;
- ☐ encourage responses through official channels;
- ☐ facilitate opportunities for a two-way feedback and comment;
- ☐ monitor topical issues in the community;
- ☐ respond to misinformation raise awareness about opportunities to engage with decision-making;
- ☐ see how the community feels about particular issues; and
- ☐ share information²².

²² QLD Government, Tools for Engagement <http://www.qld.gov.au/web/community-engagement/tools/>



Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a method that is best used in the early stages of project development to develop creative solutions to problems.

It works by focusing on a problem, and then having participants come up with as many deliberately unusual solutions as possible. During the brainstorming session there is no criticism of ideas, all ideas and options are included and discussed. The aim is to open up as many possibilities as possible, and break down preconceptions about the limits of the problem.

Brainstorming is useful in warming up a workshop and creating a sense of unity between workshop participants by “breaking the ice” between them.

Focus groups

Focus groups are a technique used to find out what issues are of most concern for a community or group when little or no information is available. They allow people to answer questions, but also to bounce ideas off one another, and provide more detailed information as people share and elaborate on their issues. Where large-scale objective information is needed, a minimum of four focus groups and as many as 12 may be needed to collect all the information needed. If appropriate, you may choose to use an independent researcher to run groups and analyse data to ensure objectivity and evidence of transparent processes.

When determining the number of people for a focus group, keep in mind that more people is not necessarily better. You will be able to dig deeper into the issues with smaller groups, but may not have the representation you require.

Telephone trees

This method allows a message to be conveyed by a number of people simultaneously when it is necessary to speak to a large number of people quickly about an event, issue or proposal.

Telephone trees rely on each person on a committee undertaking to telephone a number of specific people who cannot be reached by email, or those who check their email infrequently but who need to know urgently. If one person calls 10 people, and each of those 10 call another 10 people, one hundred people can be reached with only two rounds of calls.



Methods to consult and involve

Backcasting

The objective of this method is to weigh up the implications of different future options or policy goals.

It involves working backward from a future endpoint or set of goals to the present to determine the physical feasibility of that particular future and the policy measures required to reach that endpoint.

End-points are usually chosen for a time 25 to 50 years in the future.

Online forums

An online discussion forum or engagement platform may be useful in sourcing ideas from a large or select range of people who prefer to engage online. This method works best when:

- ☐ the topic is well defined and relatively narrow in scope;
- ☐ the objectives are clearly defined and include people generating and rating ideas rather than surveying;
- ☐ the target audience consists of individuals rather than organisations; and
- ☐ there is an adequate budget for promotion.

Using online tools to engage can also enable ongoing communication and feedback throughout the life of the project, even leading into the evaluation stage.

Kitchen table discussion

A kitchen table discussion group is a small collection of people who get together in someone's home to talk, listen and share ideas on subjects of mutual interest. These settings make the meeting informal and participants tend to respond to the more relaxed surrounds. Because they are informal, participants generally are more willing to discuss issues.

Mediation and negotiation

Negotiation is the process of searching for an agreement that satisfies various parties. An agreement may be reached either through an arbiter or through real negotiation, or mediation.

A negotiation implies a "win-win" situation in which all parties are satisfied, or are at least willing to accept the decision.

Mediation is the attempt to help parties in disagreement to hear one another, to minimise the harm that can come from disagreement, to maximise any area of agreement, and to find a way of preventing the areas of disagreement from interfering with the process of seeking a compromise or mutually agreed outcome.



Nominal group technique

Nominal group technique is a process in which a group of people become a group in name only.

This technique aims to eliminate social and psychological dynamics of group behaviour which can inhibit individual creativity and participation in group decisions. Everyone is given a structured opportunity to participate. Nominal group technique is a way of organising a meeting to enhance its productivity.

Its purpose is to balance and increase participation, to use different processes for different phases of creative problem solving and to reduce the errors in aggregating individual judgments into group decisions.

It is especially useful for problem identification, problem solving and program planning.

Methods to involve and collaborate

Citizen committees

Also known as public advisory committees and public liaison committees, citizen committees consist of a group of representatives from a particular community or set of interests appointed to provide comments and advice on an issue. Generally, relevant community groups and agencies are invited to nominate as members of the committee, although people with specific skills may also be asked.

Methods to empower

Citizen juries

Citizen juries involve the wider community in the decision making process and involve a representative sample of citizens who are briefed in detail on a particular issue, and asked to discuss possible approaches.

Citizen juries are intended to complement other forms of consultation rather than replace them. Citizens are asked to make judgments in the form of a report, as they would in legal juries. The issue they are asked to consider will be one that has an effect across the community and where a representative and democratic decision making process is required.

Local enabling groups

A local enabling group may be set up to develop a strategic direction for a project that builds on the strengths and responds to the needs of the local community and provides ongoing advice to the funding organisation such as service provision, cost sharing, facility development, funding and resource management.



9.2 SETTING UP GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

A steering committee or advisory group may be set up to facilitate ongoing involvement, collaboration and empowerment of the community.

Any such group should have a diverse membership that includes people that are representative of the community and have the right skills and expertise. The group should be managed through an agreed Terms of Reference that clearly outlines the role, responsibilities and duration of the group and how decisions will be made (voting or consensus). It is important to set up steering committees or advisory groups early in the process when they can still be involved in the decisions that need to be made.

Prior to establishing any new committee or groups, efforts should be made to find out whether there are existing groups and committees operating in the community and whether they are well or better placed to support any ongoing engagement than a new committee or group.

Steering committees

To enable high level involvement from a community, you may choose to develop a steering committee to make decisions around the priorities, scope and business of a particular project. You may select committee members based on their skills, expertise and knowledge and/or involvement and commitment to the community. You may also allow community members to select representatives who they feel can best represent their interests.

Significant issues that are high risk, high profile and complex can be elevated to the steering committee for decision-making.²³

Advisory groups

An advisory group provides an opportunity to bring together people who have a range of relevant experience, knowledge and skills that can inform, question and improve government decision-making.

Advisory groups can be a very effective way of facilitating and managing ongoing engagement and reflecting community views back to government. However, to work well they need to:

- ☐ be aware of how their advice has affected decision-making;
- ☐ include the right expertise and skills (or enough support to develop the right skills);
- ☐ be listened to;
- ☐ be reflective of the community; and
- ☐ be appropriately resourced.

²³ DPAC Collaboration: A Tasmanian Government Approach



For templates and resources around developing a steering committee go to www.egovernment.tas.gov.au

9.3 USING ONLINE ENGAGEMENT

The use of new internet-based tools, technologies and approaches that emphasise online collaboration and sharing among users has transformed the web into a powerful open platform of collaboration, engagement, co-production and participation between citizens and government.²⁴ Mobile devices, the development of apps and tablets have also changed the way people access information²⁵.

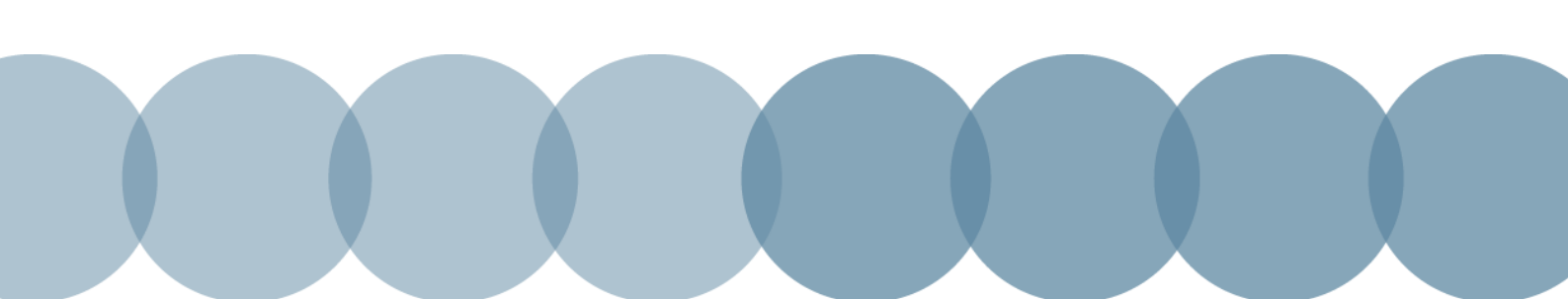
Engaging with stakeholders online has a number of benefits including:

- ☐ maximising efficiency by reducing administration;
- ☐ enabling individuals to receive information through their own enquiry;
- ☐ enabling opportunities for innovation;
- ☐ strengthening accountability and transparency and fostering public trust by providing more accessible information;
- ☐ collecting and exploring new ideas;
- ☐ making public policy more open and inclusive;
- ☐ facilitating the development of networks;
- ☐ encouraging flexible connections;
- ☐ enabling engagement with transient audiences; and
- ☐ achieving a broader reach of the community.

It is important to realise that engaging online has its limits and it is not always the best method. Many Tasmanians do not have access to a computer, have limited Internet access or may lack the necessary skills or literacy to engage online. For this reason, and depending on the topic or target audience, online engagement may be more useful as an additional method, rather than a primary method of engagement.

²⁴ Victorian Government, Department of Health - Social Media Action Plan - Part I: Policy, 2010, <http://www.egov.vic.gov.au/victorian-government-resources/website-practice-victoria/web-2-0-victoria/departement-of-health-social-media-action-plan-part-I-policy.html>

²⁵ Refer to the Tasmanian Government Communications Policy for further information.



“Technology and statistics do not replace the reality and emotional experience of living in a community, which is why it is important to go to the physical location.”

Community Member, Oatlands

Some people feel that social media trivialises issues, does not represent true engagement and encourages irresponsible, unreliable and ill-considered responses. Other risks include:

- ☐ social media may be hard to control and may cause damage if not properly managed;
- ☐ people may not know how to protect their privacy;
- ☐ discussion may turn into offensive or disrespectful debate; and
- ☐ trolling (trolling is a broad term, taking in everything from humorous comments that are designed to provoke a response, sarcasm, through to violent threats).



10. EVALUATING ENGAGEMENT

Evaluation is a structured way of assessing project success against project goals and objectives and reflecting on the lessons learned. The aim of evaluation is to use this knowledge to improve the existing project or to inform future projects.

To ensure continuous improvement, evaluation is essential. Activities should be evaluated and the lessons that are learned should be shared with the community and other agencies.

Note that there is a difference between evaluating the community engagement process and the success of the overall project.

Process for evaluating community engagement

It is best to start thinking about how you will evaluate your engagement, before beginning engagement activities.

For some community engagement activities, it is often appropriate to evaluate on an ongoing basis or throughout the life of the project. This means that any learning and feedback can be used to immediately improve engagement activities, leading to better outcomes.

Depending on the size, impact or significance of the project, evaluation may range from small scale evaluation by those facilitating the engagement, through to simple data collection (questions or surveys) or a large scale evaluation study by external, independent evaluators.

When evaluating engagement activities, you should consider how you will:

- ☐ learn from your experiences and share this knowledge across government;
- ☐ not just look at what has been done well but also what is not being done;
- ☐ determine whether the method and level of engagement was appropriate and met the needs of the community (including cultural appropriateness);
- ☐ determine whether the feedback and follow-up met the needs and expectations of the community;
- ☐ determine whether engagement influenced the decision and outcomes (why and why not);
- ☐ determine what can be done in the future to improve the quality of engagement and the quality of engagement outcomes; and
- ☐ involve the community.



Success indicators

Whether you achieve your overarching goal or precise objectives, success is determined by the outcomes a project generates at its completion and over time.

Engaging with the community can enable a great deal of learning from both parties, and develop positive relationships, which may contribute to project goals or lay stronger foundations for future engagement.

You may choose to develop success indicators to measure the value and quality of your engagement. Dependent on the project, success indicators may include:

- ☐ how many people participated in the engagement activity or program;
- ☐ whether the participants were the participants you intended;
- ☐ whether community and other feedback on the engagement process and opportunity is positive;
- ☐ how effectively the outcomes of engagement are communicated (feedback);
- ☐ whether there is general acceptance of outcomes (limited complaints after engagement has taken place);
- ☐ whether people who don't normally engage were engaged.

For further information about using the *Tasmanian Government Framework for Community Engagement* contact the Community Development Division, Department of Premier and Cabinet on 1800 204 224 or communityengagement@dpac.tas.gov.au



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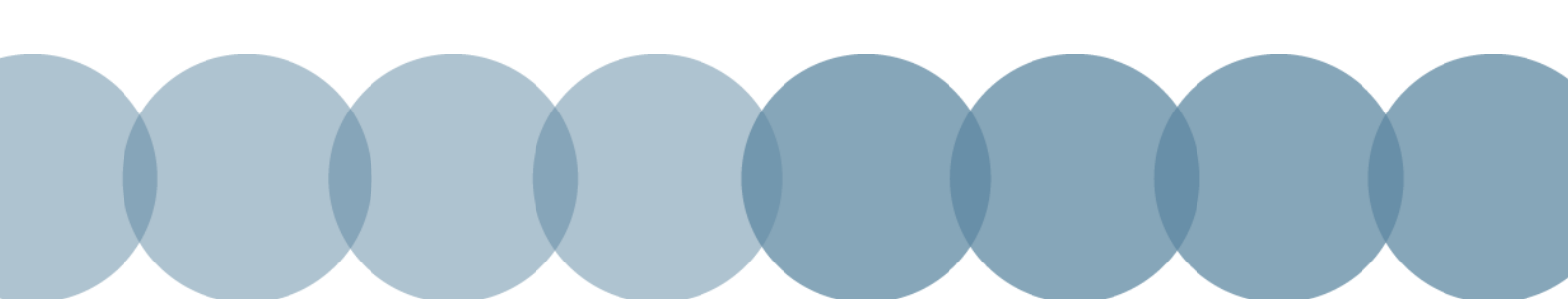
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